

VZCZCXRO1084
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHJM #0846 1421324
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 221324Z MAY 09
FM AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4910
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 000846

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA; NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR; JOINT
STAFF FOR LTGEN SELVA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/22/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [IS](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [EAGR](#)
SUBJECT: REGIONAL SETTLER COUNCIL MOVES ON EXPANSION OF
MASKIYOT SETTLEMENT

REF: A. TEL AVIV 1109
[1](#)B. 08 JERUSALEM 1382

Classified By: Acting Principal Officer Greg Marchese, per reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The Jordan Valley Regional Council issued a tender on May 12 for 20 houses in Maskiyot settlement for settler evacuees from Gaza, and held a tour for contractors on May 17. The 20 houses will be constructed outside Maskiyot's built-up area, roughly doubling the settlement's footprint. The Council Chairman said the timing of the contractor tour, on the eve of Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's meeting President Obama, was "purely coincidental." Israeli NGO Peace Now said infrastructure installation for Maskiyot's expansion could begin within a few months and claimed that the Israeli Attorney General advised Peace Now against appealing the plan. End summary.

Maskiyot spokesman: "many more houses" in master plan

[1](#)2. (C) Poloff visited Maskiyot settlement on May 21 to review the site where the Jordan Valley Regional Council approved a tender on May 12 for water, sewage, and electrical infrastructure for 20 houses for settler evacuees from Gaza (Ref B). The 20 new houses will be constructed beyond Maskiyot's built-up area and will roughly double the settlement's current footprint. Maskiyot spokesman Yossi Chazut showed Poloff the site, which is located on a hilltop approximately 400 meters southeast of Maskiyot, and said "many more houses" are included in the settlement's master plan. Chazut said contractors bidding on the tender toured Maskiyot on May 17.

[1](#)3. (C) Chazut pointed out olive groves planted recently by Maskiyot settlers, and the route of a planned road connecting Maskiyot to the main highway, Route 578. Chazut said the settlement is already profiting from olive oil that it sells in "Green Line" Israel.

Jordan Valley Regional Council Chairman:
"We are Israel's security belt"

[1](#)4. (C) Jordan Valley Regional Council Chairman David Elhayani told Poloff on May 21 that the timing of the tender and contractors' tour, on the eve of PM Netanyahu's meeting with President Obama, was "purely coincidental." Elhayani called the Jordan Valley "Israel's security belt," separating the Palestinian territories from Jordan, saying "it is in neither Israel's nor Jordan's security interests for a Palestinian state to be physically connected to Jordan." He said populating the Jordan Valley, including Maskiyot, with settlers investing in agriculture will advance Netanyahu's

"economic peace initiative." Elhayani claimed Jordan Valley settlers employ thousands of Palestinians, with whom they have an excellent relationship.

Peace Now: Maskiyot "is a political issue"

15. (C) Head of NGO Peace Now's Settlement Watch Project Hagit Ofran told Poloff on May 18 that the tender for infrastructure on the 20 new houses will close on May 28, and that installation of water, sewage, and electrical systems could begin within a few months. She said Israeli Attorney General Menachem Mazuz advised Peace Now several months ago that they would not win a legal appeal on the Maskiyot expansion plan. Peace Now decided not to pursue legal action. Ofran said Maskiyot expansion "is a political issue," and urged USG action.

Bio info: Yossi Chazut

16. (C) Chazut, who appears to be in his mid-30s, described himself as the informal head of the settlement. He said he was part of a group of 22 settler families who moved from Alon Shevut settlement, south of Jerusalem, to Gaza settlement Shirat Hayam, from which all 22 families were evacuated in 2005. According to Chazut, the Ministry of Defense approved the 20 new houses in Maskiyot specifically for his group of settler evacuees from Gaza.

MARCHESE